School Factors Influencing Secondary Student Dropouts in Nyamira County, Kenya

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Abstract: - The study was on the factors that make students to drop out of secondary schools in Nyamira District. The factors were researched under three categories: School-related, socio-economic and political factors. Simple random sampling was used select 14 schools that had participated in KCSE since 2006. A total of 56 class teachers, 14 head teachers and 280 form 3 students were purposively selected giving a total population of 350 respondents.Triangulation technique was used which included Questionnaires for teachers and students, interviews with school principals and observation of school setting and of important document. However, 45 (80.3%) of teachers' and 273 (97.5%) of students' Questionnaires were returned. It was found out that majority of the student blamed their schools for being responsible for their dropping out, yet there were other factors. It was therefore concluded that dropping out of school must be viewed as a multi causal problem. The major recommendation was that schools should improve their facilities and learning environment.

Key Words: **Factors, school dropout, school environment and secondary school**

I. INTRODUCTION

The Universal Declaration on Human Rights in 1948 by the United Nations Organization embraces education as a basic human right. Kenya being part of the signatories to the Convention supports education for all independent of age and socio-economic background. Kenya also is a signatory to the international protocol that established Education for All (EFA) agenda in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990. In addition, Kenya is a signatory to the World Educational Forum (WEF), which was established in Dakar, Senegal, in 2000. As a result of these, Kenyan government is committed to: poverty elimination as an obstacle to educational development; promotion of human rights through provision of education, and attainment of sustainable development by the provision of quality basic education for all [1].

Kenya has in the past been continuously advocating for every child's right to quality education. Access to education will continue to be facilitated for vulnerable groups such as boys and girls, orphans, children with disabilities and special needs. Having joined the United Nation (UN) on the 1st July 1965, Kenya in her provision for education is bound by all UN charter provisions like, the 1946 charter, which declared education a basic right to all children. Children are the most vulnerable members of the society by virtue of their age and stage of growth. Therefore, their rights should be safeguarded and protected, as articulated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC,1989), defining children as all persons under age of 18 years.

According to [2] dropping out of school is like the weather which is unpredictable and something everyone talks about but does little or nothing about. There has been a heated debate as to whether there should be free education for all even up to secondary level. This is due to the fact that the provision of education has become a nightmare to some parents as they struggle to purchase school uniforms, pay school fees, and finance some of the school projects. The problem of students dropping out of school is a worldwide phenomenon. Studies done indicate that the school dropout phenomena is more serious in Sub-Saharan Africa where this begins at the primary level and progresses to secondary level. Education policies and philosophies in Kenya provide a useful background and perspective in understanding the current state and problems that have beleaguered the education sector in the country [3]. In the contemporary world, improvements in student's quality achievements are recognized as the foremost objective of school reforms and restructuring efforts. According to [4], quality education includes an environment that provides adequate resources and facilities, among others. In other words teaching and learning resources are contributors of quality education. In 1948, the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights proclaimed that education especially primary was a fundamental right to every child. The Dakar conference of 2000 reviewed developments in achieving Universal Primary Education in the African continent and so every country's educational thirst was to provide universal education.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

With the increased demand for education, there has been a persistent problem of students dropping out of secondary schools. This shows that education for all has not been achieved. This is because of multi-causal factors some of which are School related, socio-economic and political [5]. Student dropout is a source of concern as non-attenders will not have basic skills to seekfor gainful employment. This research was thus designed to investigate school related factors that make students to become dropouts at secondary level of education in Nyamira District.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a concurrent mixed methods research design which used both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a more complete understanding of the research problem than either approach alone as in [6]. The target population for this study included 14 Public secondary schools in Kenya which had sat for KCSE since 2010. Non-probability (purposive) sampling was used to select head teachers. Class teachers and form three students were chosen through simple random sampling. This study had a total of 350 respondents including 14 head teachers, 56 class teachers, 280 form 3 students. Head teachers participated in the study due to the fact that they are the ones who are supposed to implement and monitor policies in secondary schools. The class teachers were picked on due to the fact that they are supposed to know all members of the class and their related details as a result of keeping and maintaining the class records. The form three students were selected due to the fact that they were deemed mature enough to fill questionnaires while the form four candidates were excluded due to being busy in preparation for KSCE.The research instruments used for data collection in this study were questionnaires, interview guide and observation schedule. Questionnaires were administered to students and class teachers.The questionnaires were deemed appropriate as they can be administered to many people in a short period of time. The Head teacher, were interviewed to gather data based on the research Questions and notes were taken.

Quantitative data was analyzed by use of descriptive statistics in form of frequencies and percentages. Qualitative data collected from observations and interviews was transcribed and analyzed on an ongoing process as themes and sub-themes emerged.

IV. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table: School Related Factors Leading to Student Dropouts

		Teachers (N=45)				Students (N=273)			
		Agree		Disagree		Agree		Disagree	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	Heave Subject workload	32	71	12	29	193	71	80	29
2	Lack of a conducive environment	37	82	8	18	184	67	89	33
3	Harassment by students	34	76	11	24	245	90	28	10
4	Non-payment of school fees	42	93	3	7	197	72	76	28
5	Poor academic performance and forced repetition	34	76	11	24	223	83	50	18
6	Teacher condoned chronic absenteeism	31	69	14	31	208	76	65	24
7	Excessive punishment	19	42	26	58	205	75	68	25
8	Fear of teachers	21	47	24	53	168	62	105	38
9	Poor management of school	36	80	9	20	205	75	68	25

Subject workload is a factor that matters in the persistence of students at school. Students will never enjoy being in school with too much book work all around them. They need time to relax and kill the monotony of being in class by exercising. Thirty two (71%) of teachers agreed that too much work imparted on the learners overwhelms them, and 193 (70.9%) of the students agreed that there is too much work covered within a short time which leads to anxiety and poor academic achievement which leads to inadequate or total lack of understanding of the content. Learners resent being given too much work which also makes them fear teachers and school life in general thus leading to drop outs. This could be due implementation of the curriculum.According to [7] certain students form adverse opinions of the curriculum if they perceive it as being irrelevant, if are unable to relate to its academic slant or meet the demands it makes and if the content or teaching style leaves them feeling as failures. This makes some of them to withdraw from school.

Learning requires a conducive environment. Thirty seven (82%) of the teachers and 184 (67%) of students agreed that school's harsh environment creates among some students a negative attitude which can contribute to poor academic performance and a general hatred towards school life eventually culminating in dropping out of school. A school environment which is dirty with litter all over, unpainted and uncompleted buildings, small classrooms where many students are overcrowded, lack of basic amenities such as clean water, electricity, hostile teachers and a general lack of essential facilities to enhance learning may cause some learners to drop out of secondary school as found out by [8]. Due to inadequate dormitories, some schools force students to sleep two per bed leading to unbecoming behavior such as sodomy and lesbianism, of which can make some unwilling students to be harassed or be expelled once caught. Sexual harassment in educational institutions around the world is increasingly becoming a serious issue [9]. Male students in clubs and cults prey on female students, abuse them verbally, cartoon them in obscene graffiti, rape and beat them. This is very common in co-educational schools where girls could be a minority. Some girls are teased and ridiculed by boys as being unfeminine if one is more intelligent than them.

School environment can also be worsened by poor diet which can be blamed for student's poor academics, unrest and dropout as indicated by[10]. There is a lot of monotony in the school diet. School menus can enhance or lower performance levels because of the king of food the students are served. Higher nutritional requirements are in infancy, childhood and adolescence. When students are not given enough to eat, their thoughts are always preoccupied with where they can get

extra food and sometimes they end up fighting over what they are offered. This therefore forces the poor performers to resort to drop out of school. According to [11], some students are susceptible to illness. Despite the effort of the government of Kenya, the medical facilities are inadequate and far apart. There is also a general shortage of doctors, clinics and other medical services in the rural areas. This combined with undernourishment, the sickly students lack resistance to infections hence causing poor performance which eventually culminates into school dropout.

Teaching and learning environments are selected to meet the requirements of instruction rather than the instruction being tailored to suit the peculiarities of the environment[12]. Studies carried out by [4] noted the effect of teaching and learning resources on students' achievement. The first study was carried out in India where 59 schools were sampled, among these, only forty nine had buildings and of these, twenty five had a toilet, twenty had electricity, ten had a school library and four had a television. In this research, the quality of the learning environment was strongly correlated with pupils' achievement in Hindi and mathematics. The second study was carried out in Latin America which included 50,000 students in grades three and four. It concluded that children whose schools lacked classroom materials and had an inadequate library were significantly more likely to show lower test scores and higher grade repetition than those whose schools were well equipped. To achieve high quality education, teaching and learning resources have to be adequate as advised by [13] and [14]. They stressed that improved facilities and resources are necessary because students tend to learn better and are therefore less dependent to the teacher and also make the learning more participatory and active hence preventing student dropout.

According to data, 34 (75%) of teachers and 245 (90%) of students agreed that harassment of students by others can contribute to student dropouts. Some students drop out or miss school for reasons associated with bullying. Although most schools are aware of it, they have not successfully eradicated it, possibly because of its furtive nature. Harassment takes many forms such as being forced to buy items, threatened to be burnt or a fine imposed on some victims, or verbal abuse. In some schools, students gang up to "discipline" harsh prefects only to cause serious injuries which makes the offenders to miss vacancies in some schools after expulsion hence become dropouts as stated by [15. Some of the students are harassed due to putting on of unpresentable school uniform in the sense that it could be worn out hence not smart according to some teachers' and students' standards. Meeting school uniform code requires a certain level of discipline from the student as noted by [16]. It also requires parental discipline to ensure the child is meeting expectations, failure to which a learner may not cope with ridicule due lack of proper school attire.

Non-payment of school fees by some poor parents contribute to school dropout in secondary schools. It was revealed that 42 (93%) of teachers and 197 (72%) of students agreed that schools send students home for non-payment of fees. On the interviews carried out, the findings indicate that poverty makes parents unable to pay school fees, thus leading to children being sent away schools that need money to run. On the other hand, principals felt that schools are "not charity institutions" where students learn without payment. Consequently, there is a greater demand for financial support from parents and from use of student labor to generate income and fetch water from streams as noted by [7]. This negatively impacts on the quality and quantity of time spent teaching and degrades students' performance and achievement. This makes some parents increasingly discouraged from sending their children to school.

With regards to financing of teaching and learning resources, [17] found that the main sources of secondary school funding in Kenya include households and the Government. Other sources of funds include private sector, religious organizations, communities, Non-Governmental Organizations, and development partners. Public resources mainly fund teachers' personnel costs and bursaries while households meet costs for provision of supplies and equipment, operations, maintenance, repair, and physical infrastructure. The funds allocated to the schools are supposed to cater for the teaching and learning resources. Among others, the Government responsibilities include, provision and maintenance of facilities, equipment and instructional materials in public secondary schools as also stated by [18].Schools therefore, depend on these funds to budget for resources. Over the years, the delays in disbursing funds and inadequate funding for education and training programmes to support free secondary school education, is what has made financing teaching and learning resources hard thus frustrating both students and teachers.

Dropout at secondary level is associated with poor academic performance and forced repetition. As indicated by 34 (76%) of teachers and 223 (82%) of the students agreed. *From the interviews, it was confirmed that students who perform poorly are advised to transfer to other schools. Once such weak students transfer to other schools and see no improvement in their academic work, they resort to dropping out.* The students who shift to other schools do so regardless of the fact that such schools could be too far ahead in syllabus coverage as noted by [7]. This means that the "academic nomads" will have most of their work uncovered leading to poor academic performance and forced repetition which will eventually culminate into dropping out of school. As students begin to perceive messages about their real academic ability in a variety of ways as a result of being labeled weak, less able, and very poor, they give up and withdraw from school due to fear of being labelled failures.

Students will only feel happier if they willfully repeat out of choice but not being forced into it. This shows that many teachers are examination oriented and totally unaware that a high proportion of students in their schools are bored or

dissatisfied with school as noted by [19]. Some students feel like they do not belong to school and the only thing they must need is motivation not condemnation as advised by [20] and [21].If not, the result is poor academic performance. However, poor performance among some students can be attributed to school dropouts especially those with low IQ and are chronically absent. It is possible that either the students refuse to attend school due to failure to understand what is being taught, get bored or perform poorly and decide to withdraw from school. According to [2], students who grasp the content of what is being taught attend school in almost all days and achieve higher grades.

Teachers condoned chronic absenteeism leads to student dropouts as agreed by 31 (69%) of teachers and 208 (76%) of students respectively. There are teachers who are just as their student absentees. Some teachers make technical appearances or are absent for some days, which leads to lagging behind in syllabus coverage, which in turn affects the students' academic progress. When a teacher is continually absent it follows that he or she is more likely to underachieve and less likely to partake in continuous developmental program experiences and instructions in school, that will meet the students' present and later life as found by [23]. Such teachers will make some of their students miss school like them and such absenteeism will be ignored by the same teachers or may not be discovered. This chronic absenteeism will eventually culminate into poor academic performance or achievements and thus one opts to drop out of school. It can also be worse if a slow learner misses class due to the teacher's absenteeism. Teachers absent themselves from school either due to sickness, drunkenness or both, or purposely to conduct their own business.

 Concerning excessive punishment, 26 (58%) disagreed while 205 (75%) agreed that it leads to student dropouts. *From the interviews, the head teachers confirmed that students get punished due to failing to follow school rules such as putting on uniform and grooming, attending assembly, smoking or abusing drugs, poor interpersonal behavior leading to fights in schools, failing to perform academic assignments and sneaking out of school. They agreed that some students are able to cope with and adapt to such rules than others.* According to [24], truants and absentees who attend school irregularly inevitably find themselves severely being punished. The forms of punishment include menial labor such as uprooting tree stumps, weeding flower beds, mopping, kneeling on concrete with hands raised, caning, suspension and expulsion. Expulsion is a form of punishment where a student is forced to be out of school due to a very serious mistake. Undisciplined students are careless, ruthless, disorganized and will play truants whenever they wish and will not do their assignment and homework. Students will never keep time or concentrate in class work if they are undisciplined leading to a bad learning environment as noted by [13]. Some may resort to abusing drugs due to failure to cope up with realities of being in school and poor academic performance.

Out of 45 teachers, 24 (53%) disagreed while 168 (62%) of the students agreed that fear of teachers lead to student dropouts. There was a difference in their perception as concerns the issue. The interviews revealed that some teachers were too harsh, get annoyed very fast, excluded some students from their lessons or used severe punishment to barter for good behavior without asking the students to explain their problem. This creates fear in students who end up seeing teachers as hostile, monsters and forces individual students to opt out of school. Students prefer teachers who are relatively strict but fair and approachable, who show an interest in helping them learn, are patient, having a sense of humor and ability to give remedial attention to the weak students [21].

Management refers to the way the school is controlled, developed and cared for in terms of finances, buildings, comfort and the general school environment. From the findings, 36 (80%) of teachers agreed and 205 (75%) of the students disagreed that poor school management leads to school dropout. This showed a variation in responses perhaps due to the inability of the students to fully understand the management process. The best managed schools have adequate facilities as the fees collected is used for maintenance and renovation of buildings, buying food for the students and the other amount is used to employ workers, caretakers and temporary teachers as confirmed by [25] and [26] . This facilitates the smooth running of the schools unlike poor management which results in indiscipline and dropping out among some students. It is also true that different leadership styles affect student attendance as noted in [27]. The head teachers who utilize Laissez Fair leadership style encouraged students to attend school when they feel like and do what they want in their own way. This leads to chronic absenteeism, truancy, failure in examinations and finally withdrawal from school. Likewise, head-teachers who wield too much power, and never allow even minimum discussion with students, result in dissatisfaction, complaints, strikes and arsons which lead to either individual choice to drop out or expulsion from school. Good school management also goes alongside with democratic election of prefects.

V. CONCLUSIONS

From the findings, it was concluded that the problem of students dropping out is complex as it is caused by a variety multi-related school factors. It is apparent from the students that it not only students from low socio-economic status that drop out of school but even some from well off families due to poor academic performance, drug abuse, and chronic sickness and absenteeism.

The variation between students and teachers responses suggests that collectively they themselves understand causes of student dropout differently and are not nearer to finding a viable solution. There is therefore a need for concerned effort

of the government, educational administrators, teachers, parents, and students to curb or minimize student dropout from secondary schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The school environment should be made conducive to allow learners to do their studies through the provision of textbooks and improvement of facilities. Stern measures should be taken to eliminate bullying, violence and sexual harassment. Guidance and counselling of the learners and parents should be intensified. The learners who perform poorly academically and those with behavioral problems should be guided and counselled. Teachers also need to be advised to be friendly and approachable.

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